

Friends *Forward*



SUMMER 2007

Bringing History to Refuges

Three Friends groups have been awarded Preserve America grants by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to help provide interpretive and educational projects that focus on the three national wildlife refuges' historical and cultural significance and their environmental importance. Matching funds will be provided by the Friends organizations and other sponsors.

The winning proposals were submitted by the Friends of Kenai Refuge in Alaska, Rydell National Wildlife Refuge in Minnesota and Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge in Massachusetts. The Preserve America Grant Program provides \$10,000-\$15,000 to help pay for efforts undertaken with partners to protect historic sites, make history a part of refuge interpretive and education programs and establish closer ties with communities.

Here's more on the grant-winning projects:

- At Kenai Refuge, educational interpretive panels will be prepared for display at 10 restored cabins, partially meeting a requirement for on-site information and education under the Refuge Cabin Management Plan. The refuge offers eight historic cabins and five new cabins for public use. Three other cabins, including two that are on the National Register of Historic Places, are managed for their historical benefits.
- The Friends of the Rydell Refuge, where 2,100 acres were once occupied by pioneering homesteaders, will



Educational interpretive panels for display at 10 restored cabins on Kenai National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska are among the projects that received Preserve America grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

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compile information about the natural and human history of the area and then produce a 20 to 30-minute DVD for use in the refuge Visitor Center and elsewhere. The program will largely focus on the dramatic changes in the Prairie Pothole Region of Northwestern
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Passing the *Forward* Around

Friends Forward newsletter is available online so you can pass the word around to everyone in your Friends organization and those who might consider membership. Due to financial constraints, a limited number of newsletter copies are mailed to Friends organizations and refuge staff at the national wildlife refuge address. Once you get your copy, send your Friends to <http://www.fws.gov/friends/home/frontpg-blue-600.asp> to get the latest edition. 🌱

From the Chief

Yours Are the Important Voices

A number of new House and Senate members were elected to Congress last November, and we have set out to familiarize them and their staffs with our operations and what it takes to run the 96-million-acre Refuge System. So far, we have done fairly well, starting with the first in a series of planned orientation sessions on Capitol Hill.

Deputy Refuge Chief Jim Kurth and I met with a number of Capitol Hill



Geoff Haskett

staff members and representatives of non-governmental organizations. We were thrilled that Representative Ron Kind of Wisconsin, co-chair of the Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus, unexpectedly kicked off the information session with remarks that emphasized the importance and value of the Refuge System.

I provided an overview of our mission, a short survey of the economic contributions refuges make to local communities and a description of the
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First Step Is a Winner

Since its creation in December 2001, Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge—the nation’s only international wildlife refuge—has rapidly extended the range of its wildlife habitats. At the same time, the refuge’s Friends group—the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance—has been operating at a fevered pace.

It has enthusiastically created firm connections with metropolitan Detroit’s corporate and private sectors and significantly increased public awareness. That was clear April 28 at the Alliance’s second annual Benefit Dinner, when some 450 national and local political leaders, business and foundation figures, state and federal conservation officials and scores of grass roots supporters turned out.

Last year’s dinner raised nearly \$100,000, according to Anita Twardesky, the Alliance’s vice-chair; the 2007 dinner again generated nearly \$100,000.

But raising cash wasn’t the primary goal in 2006, when the first dinner was held just months after the Alliance was

launched. “At the start, we looked at the dinner as a celebration of the refuge’s success,” Twardesky said. “We were hoping to sell 200 tickets; instead, nearly 350 tickets were sold in three weeks.”

The first dinner’s program included a VIP reception, a tasting of Michigan wines, photo opportunities with prominent lawmakers and both silent and live auctions. “People came to network and help a good cause,” Twardesky said. “We put their contributions to good use right away.” The benefit’s revenues helped pay for an observation deck along the Detroit River as well as a walkway for birding tours and a birding brochure for the driving tour route.

Twardesky offers a little advice about fund-raising dinners:

- Planning needs to be assigned to a very passionate committee, people who can put in the time and make things happen. It’s better to have two or three hard workers than a large group that can’t agree on what has to be done.

specialist, and Mark Musaus, long-time manager of Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee Refuge in Florida and now chief of the Refuge Division of Visitor Services and Communications, to lead the discussion. They gave folks a whirlwind tour of what they might see and do at some national wildlife refuges.

Every time we talk about national wildlife refuges and their accomplishments, we talk about our Refuge Friends. We could not orient nearly as many people about wildlife refuges, guide so many school groups, or offer the range of interpretive programs without your help and enthusiasm. So, when we brief our lawmakers, we highlight our Refuge Friends. Your work and support is a source of pride, both for us and for those members of Congress who count you among their constituents. 🍀



Courtesy of IWRA

International Wildlife Refuge Alliance Secretary Mary Bohling and her husband Roy welcomed Congressman John Dingell to the second annual Benefit Dinner in April, when some 450 national and local political leaders, business and foundation figures, state and federal conservation officials and scores of grass roots supporters turned out.

- Find out what other groups or institutions in your area have done, and do things a little differently.

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From the Chief

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vital role played by volunteers. Jim then covered the evolution of the Refuge System over the last hundred years or so, giving some insights about those who have led the system and some memorable anecdotes. He also described how the Refuge System differs from other public lands.

Comments we heard during a question-and-answer session and in conversations after the briefing reflected a deep-felt appreciation for the efforts of the National Wildlife Refuge System. All in all, it was a tremendous start. But it was just a start.

The second congressional briefing took place in late June. We asked Maggie O’Connell, national visitor services

Mentoring Visits to Four States

Friends groups in Alabama, Alaska, Florida and Louisiana are getting practical advice on establishing and sustaining their organizations and partnerships this year through the National Wildlife Refuge Friends Mentoring Program.

Under the program, a two-member mentoring team—in each case an experienced Friends representative joined by a seasoned refuge manager—provides customized help for Friends organizations, the well-established as well as the brand-new.

Friends organizations forming or already established at Eufaula Refuge (AL), St. Vincent Refuge (FL), Southwest Louisiana Refuge Complex and the Alaska refuges were selected to receive mentoring visits during 2007.

Applications for next year’s program are due in spring 2008. For more information about the program, contact Trevor Needham at Trevor_Needham@fws.gov or 703-358-2392. 🍀

Reversing Your Carbon Footprint

The next time you book a trip through Travelocity, you have the chance to help your local refuge. Travelocity is just one of many businesses that are part of a new partnership between The Conservation Fund and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that will help restore wildlife habitat on national wildlife refuges while it helps offset carbon emissions.

The Go ZeroSM program was announced this spring at Santee National Wildlife Refuge in South Carolina, where approximately 25 acres of native forest habitat will be restored. Go Zero is a carbon sequestration program intended to engage companies, communities and individuals in combating climate change.

Go Zero measures the specific carbon dioxide emissions generated by different human activities—from airplane travel to energy use in office buildings to community events and individual lifestyles. Customers of participating companies are able to “zero out” or offset their carbon emissions through a donation to The Conservation Fund that is used to plant trees that absorb carbon dioxide.

Participating companies include the Walt Disney Company, The North Face, Home Depot, Timberland, ESPN X Games, Toyota, Universal Studios, and New Line Cinema, among others.

So far, the Fund says, the Go Zero program has planted 5 million trees on 25,000 acres that will sequester 7 million tons of carbon dioxide over the next century. Many trees have already been planted on refuges in Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, New Jersey and Virginia. More plantings are scheduled this year and next at refuges in California, Mississippi, Illinois, New Jersey, South Carolina, Oklahoma and Michigan. Each acre is planted with about 400 seedlings. Parcels should be at low risk for destruction from fire or wind. All Go Zero forests are native trees but individual refuges determine the mix of species.

Earlier this year, 50 acres of oak and bald cypress underwritten by Go Zero were planted at Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge in Louisiana, 45 miles north of New Orleans. Another 100 acres of slash pine were planted at Big Branch Marsh



Tom MacKenzie/USFWS

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director H. Dale Hall joined in planting one of the trees at Santee National Wildlife Refuge in South Carolina, where approximately 25 acres of native forest habitat will be restored under a new partnership.

National Wildlife Refuge in Louisiana. In both cases, the trees were planted in habitat damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

For more information about the program, go to <http://www.conservationfund.org/?article=3128&back=true>. 🌱

New Visitor Services and Communications Chief

Mark Musaus, who has been manager of Florida’s Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge since 1998, is now leading the Refuge System’s Division of Visitor Services and Communications, responsible for national coordination with Refuge Friends organizations, among other duties. Musaus took over as division chief on May 20 after Allyson Rowell left the position upon her retirement from the federal government.

Named Refuge Manager of the Year in 2000 and Federal Land Manager of the Year for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2005, Musaus has broad experience with the Friends movement. He has worked as a Friends Mentor for seven years and as a national instructor for various Friends courses since



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Mark Musaus

2001, the same year he began teaching in the Refuge Managers Academy.

During his years at Loxahatchee Refuge, the Friends group annually raised

\$15,000 for environmental education programs and the Everglades state festival. At the same time, the organization supported an annual photography contest and an art contest. In 2005, the Friends of Loxahatchee raised \$35,000 to build a fishing pier near the visitor center. Now, they are undertaking a much larger endeavor, seeking to raise \$600,000 for exhibits in a new Visitor Center.

Musaus, who began his career at Loxahatchee Refuge as a student trainee, brings a wealth of on-the-ground experience. Among his postings, he served as assistant refuge manager at J.N. “Ding” Darling Refuge in Florida, which has long had a tremendously active Friends group, and as deputy project leader at Savannah Coastal Refuge Complex in Georgia.

“Friends groups are valuable partners,” said Musaus. “Just as individual refuges are unique, so are Friends groups. But one element they all have in common is their ability to keep the Refuge System strong. Whether they operate a bookstore or raise funds for refuge facilities, the work of Friends organizations in advocacy and in facilitating programs is instrumental to national wildlife refuges.” 🌱

From Friend to Friend

Buy a Plate, Help a Friend

Thanks to Friends of the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge, Montana drivers can now display a license plate that depicts a striking view of the outdoors and provides a plug for national wildlife refuges.

Getting the plate into production required the Friends group to pay a one-time fee of \$4,000 to the Department of Motor Vehicles—which already sells specialty plates for several nonprofit organizations—and provide suitable art work. For the art, Dave Woodgerd, president of the Friends organization, turned to Montana artist Peggy Woods. Her design features a great blue heron with the Bitterroot Mountains in the background and in the foreground, the Bitterroot Valley wetlands, where the Metcalf refuge is located. “Wildlife Refuges” is stamped at the bottom.

Two hundred plates have already been sold. The Friends group receives \$20 for each one sold. Once they’ve earned back their \$4,000 fee, Woodgerd said any income will be ploughed into Friends projects. One that’s now on the drawing boards is an addition to the Visitor Center for additional educational activities. Not long off the drawing boards is the refuge’s new Aquatic Education Pond, designed for kids. The Friends helped underwrite the pond project.



Friends of Lee Metcalf

Friends of the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge sold 200 specially-printed license plates soon after they became available. The Friends group receives \$20 for each one sold.

What a Terrific Ad Can Do

“Enjoy the peace and tranquility of a pristine area that is just being discovered. Escape the heat of the summer on the cool and fantastically beautiful southern Oregon coast.”

An ad for a hard-to-beat summer vacation?

In a way, yes, but the description of an idyllic coastal scene was part of an unusual (and successful) national recruiting effort by Shoreline Education for Awareness (SEA), the Friends organization for the Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex. SEA was looking for a few good volunteers to work as docents for up to five months in exchange for a free room at a refuge bunkhouse.

In the warm-weather months, SEA stations its guides at two platforms that provide spectacular views of rugged coastline and a vast array of wildlife. Because the local population can’t provide enough docents, the Friends group posted the ad on the federal government’s volunteer Web site (www.volunteer.gov/gov).

“Our local volunteers can’t give more than six hours a month,” says SEA president Bill Russell. “Our bunkhouse docents provide 20 hours a week of interpretation.” Russell was delighted with the response to the ad. The first to sign up was a retired attorney from Tennessee.

During the summer, SEA guides work in pairs during three-hour shifts at the viewing platforms, greeting visitors and passing out brochures. “They talk with our guests about the landscape and the wildlife for two minutes or two hours, depending on the interest,” Russell says. Those who’d like a closer look at



The Shoreline Education for Awareness, the Friends organization for the Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex, got great response from its ad for some volunteer docents at Bandon Marsh Refuge, who got free room and a chance to see some of the nation’s most spectacular coastline.

breeding seabirds or harbor seals are provided with spotting scopes.

The docents share the bunkhouse with visiting researchers. As SEA’s ad notes, “Volunteers will have ample time for hiking, surfing, fishing, kayaking and sightseeing.”

Celebrating a Town—and a Refuge

To attract visitors to their refuge and develop ties with local residents, the Friends of Erie National Wildlife Refuge in Pennsylvania seized on the idea of organizing an area festival.

After local businesses and non-profits eagerly signed up, the Friends group, which was formed last year, began applying the finishing touches to plans for the first Guys Mills Heritage Festival, scheduled for late June 2007. Festival events were held at the refuge and in Guys Mills, an agricultural community.

Anyone who wandered around town could sample food and snacks dished

up by the United Free Evangelical Church and a Cub Scout Pack, kick the tires of equipment that the volunteer fire department displayed and take in several arrangements of historical displays.

The refuge—which held its first open house in several years on festival day—and its Friends group also provided visitors with plenty to see and do, including special activities for children, bird and tree identification walks, and a wood carver showing off his skills.

“The refuge is 10 to 15 miles from most towns, so lots of people in the area don’t even know the refuge is here,” says Bill Trout, president of the Friends group. “We see the festival as a way of introducing people to the refuge—and to get them coming back. Along the way, we hoped to sign up new Friends.”

Count a Bird, Orient a Visitor

One cold day earlier this year, Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge in Idaho was swarming with a flock of kids who had their eyes on the skies. Casting about for flying saucers, or the first flakes of snow? Nope, they were counting birds—and having a great old time of it.

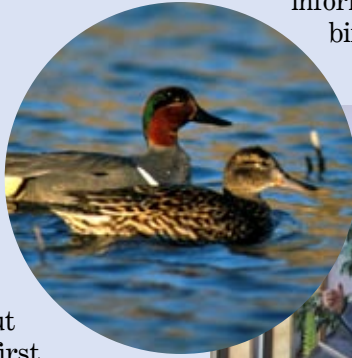
Deer Flat’s Friends organization, like many of its counterparts at refuges across the country, was taking advantage of the annual Great Backyard Bird Count to introduce neighbors, young and old, to the educational and recreational opportunities at their refuge. Before the event, the Deer Flat Friends circulated and posted fliers. A teacher took a handful to her school.

“We had about 90 kids and their parents,” says Noreen Tripp, president of the Friends of the Deer Flat Refuge. “Quite a few hadn’t been to the refuge before.” Tripp said that several parents

and youngsters subsequently made return visits; some of the newcomers became Friends.

The young counters were among many thousands of Americans helping the National Audubon Society and Cornell University Lab of Ornithology not only to compile a national beak-count, but also to look for early signs of species that are having unusual surges or declines in number; or changing their behavior. Nationally, participants in the count reported sighting 616 species and more than 11 million birds in the United States and Canada.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is held every February. The Society also sponsors a Christmas Bird Count, the oldest and largest citizen science event in the world. The Christmas count runs December 14 to January 5. For more information, go to <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/howto.html>.



Denise Hughes

Many of the people who were introduced to Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge when they joined the Friends group for the Great Backyard Bird Count returned later to find out more about the refuge, some of them joining a nature walk.

Send Us Your Stories

This is your newsletter; so we would love to hear from you. Please send your story ideas and questions to National Friends Coordinator Trevor_Needham@fws.gov. We would love to feature your Friends group.

Bringing History to Refuges

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Minnesota that took place from the early 1900s through the 1980s.

- Assabet River, one of eight refuges within the Eastern Massachusetts Refuge Complex, has a long cultural history. The grant will underwrite presentations that focus on the land-use/occupancy of the 2,200 acres comprising the refuge—colonial, small family farmstead, military and refuge. Planned interpretive displays, one of them a PowerPoint presentation, will be available for viewing at a new Visitor Center as well as on the refuge Friends’ Web site.

For more information about the grants and the application process, go to www.nfwf.org or on the Service’s cultural resources Web site at <http://www.fws.gov/HistoricPreservation/crp/index.html>.

First Step is a Winner

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- What are you trying to accomplish? What kinds of people do you want there? Consider whether a large event would be as effective as two or three smaller ones.

- Have people go home with a great sense of your mission. Never underestimate the level of community interest in your cause. “If you make it clear that your event will be an interesting, even fun way to support a worthy cause, they will come.”

Twardesky is willing to share her experience with Friends groups. Contact her at 734-626-5465 or by e-mail anita@riversidekayak.com.

Midway Journal: Pulling Weeds and Counting Birds

For much of the year, Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge is home to nearly 2 million birds, among them the world's largest population of Laysan albatross, or gooney birds. Periodically, volunteers join the refuge's on-going battle against invasive plants and assist with a bird count. A recent issue of the Gooney Gazette, published by the Friends of Midway Atoll (FOMA), was largely devoted to volunteers' accounts of their experiences. Here are edited excerpts:

One Weed at a Time

Midway, which still bears prominent reminders of World War II, is one of the most remote coral atolls on earth, yet not beyond the reach of invasive plants. One is a bright, yellow flower native to the Southwest, the golden crownbeard. This aggressive weed infests an estimated 20 percent of Midway. There is considerable concern that the golden crownbeard is overgrowing valuable nesting habitat. Removing it and restoring native plants will take years of hard work and lots of sweat.

Friends of Midway Atoll began doing their part last year by using a grant

from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and support from the Biological Conservation Assistance Program to help hand-clear about nine acres; after a visit by volunteers this past winter, the total is up to 20 acres. Volunteers also helped cleanup marine debris, hauling clumps of netting and ropes from the beach, which can entangle sea turtles and monk seals.

First Impressions

One volunteer writes: How many people have an opportunity to live surrounded by an albatross colony? Every morning, I can walk out my door and see thousands of the birds. In the evening, the sky is filled with Bonin petrels; on the ground, they look like little web footed blind mice. The white terns hover over you, making space invader sounds . . . while their chicks cling to precarious perches awaiting food. Who wouldn't love the sight of two Laysan albatross gently nuzzling and preening each other as they await the hatching of their fuzzy offspring.



Todd Finlayson

Friends of Midway Atoll member Christy Finlayson was among the volunteers who joined the refuge's on-going battle against the invasive *Verbesina*, which grows among dense Laysan albatross nests and Bonin petrel burrows.

Talking to the Eggs

A bird counter's report: An old sign left from Midway's decades as a Navy facility describes the atoll as sitting at "the edge of the empire." Volunteers who arrived in December to count the Laysan and black-footed albatross included people who have made a career of working around birds as well as less bird-wise individuals who jumped at a chance to help.

Concerned about the decline in every species of albatross in the southern hemisphere, the Service began bird counts at Midway in 1992 to monitor the health of the albatross populations. Volunteers move in a line through sections with a mechanical counter and an inverted paint can to make a tiny dot of orange paint beside each active nest.

Many of us felt pain caused by the repetitive motion of squeezing paint stick triggers. Misfires quickly turned our boots and sneakers orange. Challenging encounters with the invasive golden crownbeard strained muscles. Sometimes, we had to chop our way through thickets as high as 10 feet to find birds to count.

Friends Receive \$50,000 in Grants

In the first round of 2007 awards, National Wildlife Refuge Friends Grants worth \$50,000 were awarded to 11 Friends groups to help with start-up, capacity building and refuge projects. The program is underwritten by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and its partners. Among those receiving the grants were:

- *Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges*. Their project is designed to restore trails and replace interpretative signs at Bayou Lacombe Center, devastated by Hurricane Katrina.
- *Friends of Iroquois Refuge (NY)*. The group is partnering with the refuge and a conservation group to conduct

environmental education programs on the refuge for local schools, including those in the Buffalo system.

- *Friends of Laguna Atascosa Refuge (TX)*. The grant will help finance and expand interpretive kayak trips designed for, among other groups, students and wildlife watchers.

Applications for the second round of 2007 grants must be received by September 4. Application forms are available at: http://www.nfwf.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Browse_All_Programs&CONTENTID=5336&TEMPL ATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm

For more information, contact Trevor Needham at Trevor_Needham@fws.gov or 703-358-2392. 🌱

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Question: What's the value of the time that Friends groups invest in refugees?

Answer: Friends contribute many, many hours to advancing a wide array of refuge programs. Beyond its immediate value to refugees, all this donated time can help Friends groups obtain additional funding; the hours can satisfy grant-makers' matching funds requirements and demonstrate the Friends' interest in and commitment to specific projects and to refugees.

Friends groups should peg the value of their work to the most current Independent Sector hourly rate for volunteer work. For 2007, that rate is \$18.77 an hour.

Question: How can Friends groups maintain or re-establish good working relationships with refugees after key staff members move to another refuge or retire?

Answer: Change is the only constant: Refuge managers and staff retire or move. Board terms end. Life changes draw people away.

Because of these always-present possibilities, it's best to avoid relying on just one or two dynamic leaders because once these leaders move on, once-strong Friends/Refuge collaborations can weaken. In sustainable collaborations, members shift the focus from individuals to the organization and build a culture where everyone is responsible for managing and cultivating the partnership.

Change can also be a tool for growth; without change, partnerships can stagnate. But changes need to be properly managed. The organizational missions and the collaboration's visions, goals and plans provide the foundations for managing transitions. In the end, new leaders can readily pick up where former leaders left off. 🌱

Send us your stories and questions: *We want this newsletter to serve your needs and interests. So, please send your ideas, questions events for the calendar to either Martha_Nudel@fws.gov or Trevor_Needham@fws.gov.*

Midway Journal
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By the end of the first week, someone recommended taking regular doses of Vitamin I, explaining to the confused that "Vitamin I" is ibuprofen.

Other challenges were under-foot. Bonin petrels build often-fragile underground burrows. Every bird counter stepped through a burrow. As our feet sank, so did our hearts as we quickly began carefully withdrawing from the burrows, hoping no birds were injured.

An obstetrician from Minnesota was fascinated by nesting birds "talking" to their eggs. He has often advised young parents to talk to their unborn children as a form of bonding. It should be said, however, that he was also seen scolding one mate-less bird who was imitating the nesting habits of others: "Stop talking like you have an egg. You don't!"

As we sat during breaks, it was highly satisfying to watch birds stand and stretch their wings, possibly for the first time in weeks, enjoying their new, open nesting space. The image is among the many happy memories we took home with us. 🌱

Calendar of Friend and National Events

August 4, 1 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.: Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge, DE, Shorebirds by Impression: A Different Approach to Field Identification with Kevin T. Karlson. Karlson has been a wildlife photographer for 26 years and active as a birder for 28 years. This approach to field identification focuses on impressions of non-changeable field characteristics of size, shape and behavior/body language to form a fast picture of every bird seen.

August 11, 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.: Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge, RI, Take Me Fishing Day in partnership with Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and North Attleboro Fish Hatchery. For more information: Janis Nepshinsky, 401-364-9124, extension 28.

September 4: National Wildlife Refuge Friends Grant Program applications due. To download application, go to: http://www.nfwf.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Browse_All_Programs&CONTENTID=5336&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm.

September 25 – 29: Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, Sea Otter Awareness Week with hands-on activities, special speakers and displays to learn about the sea otters of Alaska. For more information: <http://www.IslandsAndOcean.org>.

October 7 – 13: National Wildlife Refuge Week. Scores of refuges across the country are celebrating with special events and festivals. See some online at http://www.fws.gov/refuges/SpecialEvents/FWS_SpecialEventsCalendar.cfm.

Friends Take a Turn at the Witness Table

Friends from Alaska, Florida, New Jersey and Virginia took advantage of a rare opportunity in April and personally urged a key House appropriations subcommittee to increase support for the National Wildlife Refuge System. The House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee scheduled a Public Witness Day—its first in 14 years—and the Friends quickly obtained places on the witness list.

The five Friends, who came to Washington, DC, at their own expense, were Marie Springer, president of the Friends of Wallkill River (NJ); Molly Brown, president of the Friends of Back Bay (VA); David Raskin, president of Friends of Alaska Refuges; John McCabe, Board member from J.N. “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society (FL); and Walt Stieglitz, Board member of the Pelican Island Preservation Society (FL). They all presented compelling stories about their specific refuges, including land acquisition issues, as well as calling for an allocation of \$451.5 million for the Refuge System. In some instances, as they described conditions on the ground, the Friends compared how the refuges would fare with full funding and with reduced funding.

Marie Springer, of the Friends of Wallkill River, also focused on the mandates of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. “The law requires the Refuge System to do certain things” she said, “and the System has to be able to pay people to carry out those responsibilities.” She was introduced

by Representative Maurice Hinchey, a member of the Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus.

Members of the subcommittee, Springer later said, read the Friends’ statements and “asked good questions.” Afterwards, she and others in the group stopped by congressional office to discuss the Refuge System with other members of Congress or their staff assistants. Several Friends groups failed to get places on the witness list, filled on a first come, first served basis, but they submitted written testimony.

Restoring America’s Wildlife Legacy Meanwhile, as the FY 08 budget makes its way through Congress, Refuge System

supporters in the House and the Senate have weighed in. In separate written appeals, members of the House and Senate called for the allocation of \$451.5 million for operations and maintenance. Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus co-chairs, Ron Kind of Wisconsin and Jim Saxton of New Jersey, launched the process.

Elsewhere, a coalition of 21 wildlife, sporting, conservation and scientific groups, in a report entitled *Restoring America’s Wildlife Legacy 2007*, urged Congress to increase Refuge System operations and maintenance funding to \$765 million by FY 2013. To see the report, go to <http://www.fundrefuges.org/care/carehome.html>. 🌱

Polar Bears Elicit Huge Response

The proposed listing of the polar bear as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act has attracted a blizzard of responses from the public. By the end of the comment period on April 9, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service logged more than 500,000 e-mails, letters and petitions.

The Service will take until the end of 2007 to gather more information, undertake additional analyses, and assess the reliability of relevant scientific models.

In announcing the listing proposal on December 27, 2006, Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorn said, “Polar bears are one of nature’s ultimate survivors, able to live and thrive in one of the world’s harshest environments. But we are concerned the polar bears’ habitat may literally be melting.”

Scientific observations have revealed a decline in late summer Arctic sea ice to the extent of 7.7 percent per decade



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More than 500,000 comments were received by early April on the proposal to list the polar bear as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act.

and in the perennial sea ice area of 9.8 percent per decade since 1978. There are 19 polar bear populations in the circumpolar Arctic, containing an estimated 20,000-25,000 bears.

A Final Rule is expected to be published in the *Federal Register* in early 2008. 🌱

Friends *Forward*

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